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## ELOCUTION, ORAL COMPOSITION, OR PUBLIC SPEAKING

S. L. GARRISON, Worcester Academy

In the good old days of our grandparents, when all things were better done than they are done now, the art of elocution reigned supreme. The art, however, become so converted into artifice, the thundering of nature into the raving of talking machines, that even the gullible public began to have doubts about the efforts of other people's young hopefuls who were inevitably called into the room of the plush furniture to recite, "The boy stood on the burning deck." There then grew up in place of this elocution what is called oral composition. Its purpose was to eliminate the artificiality of ancient art and to give training in the expression of the boy's thought—which the other form entirely neglects. The weakness of this later method is that the teacher is generally not a specialist and frequently not even trained in the technique of the voice. The time given to the work is generally insufficient.

The old method elocution, neglected the training of the thought; the other method, oral composition, neglects the training of the voice; a third and comparatively recent method, public speaking, seeks to attain a golden mean wherein both training in speech and training in thought receive proper emphasis.

In this new method of training in spoken discourse, the great essential is a teacher thoroughly competent both in voice technique and in the art of composition. The training itself naturally is graded in three steps; in the first two

years the pupil should have preliminary drill in oral composition; in the third year logically comes work in declamation which may well culminate in a prize speaking; in the fourth year comes the more distinctive part of the work—the composition and delivery of such public addresses as arguments and after-dinner speeches.

Concerning the first point, the training of the teacher, little is to be said except to emphasize the need of it. Professor Winter has stated in his *Public Speaking* that the training in voice and in method of speech is a technical matter. "It ought not," he asserts, "to be left to the haphazard treatment, the intense spurring on, of vocally unskilled coaches for speaking contests . . . . The results of vocal teaching show . . . . that there are few branches of instruction wherein the specially trained teacher is so much needed, and can be so effective as in the art of speaking."

The two years of preliminary work in oral composition, however, can be done by the English teacher who has no technical training. The value of the work is in such elementary matters as enunciation and pronunciation. "Effective teaching here demands criticism upon the pronunciation of words, clear enunciation of syllables, posture, ability to stand before the class and look the members in the eye . . . ." These short speeches or oral themes need not be more than a few minutes in length; they will not, moreover, call for particularly vigorous expression. The need for the technician, therefore, is not great in the preliminary drill in oral composition.

To cure the flat nasal tones which most boys have and the tense throat contractions of the school boys' debates, and likewise to give practice in more vigorous expression, there is the third year course in declamation under the special instructor in public speaking.

To give order and uniformity to the work, and to secure the greatest literary training as a by-product, it seems best to have a definite and logical arrangement of selections. At Worcester Academy there are twelve sets of declamations during half the school year. Each set of speeches is composed of a short life of an orator or writer and four selections from his works. It seems wise to begin with more recent writers or speakers and to work back to the classics, because the former are more interesting and easier to interpret.



A possible arrangement of four sets of selections is as follows:

- |                             |                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| I. Modern Poets             | III. British Orators          |
| A. Noyes                    | A. Burke                      |
| B. Kipling                  | B. O'Connell                  |
| C. Stevenson                | C. Bright                     |
| II. Famous American Orators | IV. Greatest National Writers |
| A. Wendell Phillips         | A. Goethe                     |
| B. Lincoln                  | B. Hugo                       |
| C. Webster                  | C. Shakespeare                |

The two elements which must be considered in making the selection are simplicity and interest. Care must be taken not to go "over the heads" of the boys. The narrative poems and simple emotional orations are very popular. Noyes, "Highwayman", Kipling's Ballads, Grady's "New South", Webster's jury addresses, and Hugo's narratives are most popular. The program begins with a short biography of the author or orator studied. The more gifted boys should be given the task of writing these short sketches; they should be instructed to use fitting incidents and anecdotes. Sometimes it is advisable to give extra credit for this work, or else assign to one boy the writing of it and to another the delivery. In the life of Shakespeare, for example, have them mention the deer episode, his unusual marriage experience, his trip to London, and how he supported himself there. It is of little use to have them give the dates of the plays, or any appreciation of Shakespeare as a dramatist; the boys are much more interested in his epitaph.

After each boy in the junior class has delivered at least one declamation, unless he be physically disabled, it is the custom to select from twelve to twenty of the most promising speakers to participate in the Annual Junior Prize Speaking. It is best to have this endowed if possible, because that lends to it the weight of tradition. At Worcester the Dexter Prize Speaking has been in existence for forty-two years; there are three prizes, twenty-five dollars, fifteen dollars and ten dollars. The contest is the big occasion of the junior year.

This brings us to the last part of the training in public speaking, the senior course. In the case of the juniors we try to remedy the weakness of oral composition—that it gives only superficial attention to the technique of the voice—by the aid of a specially trained instructor. In the case of the seniors we try to cure the trouble of elocution—that it

does not rain in thought and at the same time we try to add point and practicality to the work in oral composition by giving advanced training in the composition and delivery of arguments and after-dinner speeches.

The senior course consists in twelve sets of speeches before the whole school. Each boy is supposed to give one debate and one after-dinner speech. There are, therefore, six debates and six sets of after-dinner speeches. The debates are delivered in chapel; five boys participate; the first gives the introduction covering a history of the question and an analysis into the two principal points at issue; one boy on each side speaks on each issue; there are no rebuttals, but refutation is handled in the main speeches.

Debating exists in nearly every school and college. It is at various times and in various places good, bad, and indifferent. To many of us it seems to be generally bad. The trouble in most cases is apparently due to the fact that it has become mechanical and artificial. To add life to it, to make it interesting, we insist at Worcester largely upon concreteness. To eliminate the artificial, and to secure naturalness, we prohibit all technical terms and fixed forms of expression that have grown up with debating as a game.

Concreteness is without a doubt the most effective instrument in securing force. Specific objects make upon the mind more definite and more vivid impressions than do general ones; the appeal of the abstract is purely intellectual. We therefore encourage the use of illustrations, analogies, and incidents. It was found last year to be worth while to devote one whole debate to exaggerating, and thereby emphasizing, the value of the metaphor and simile. The subject happened to be whether the navy should be increased. The affirmative were told to liken the various nations to so many dogs. We were made to see the English bull, with his Rooseveltian mouthful of gleaming teeth (dreadnoughts); the German dachshund, a cross between a bull-dog and a beer-barrel, and an adept at clawing out the vitals of his enemies by means of his submarine claws; finally, the lean American "houn' dawg" with the hoof and mouth disease, for he has neither submarines nor dreadnoughts. The negative, on the other hand, were given this quotation:

"For angling rod he took a sturdy oak;  
For line a cable that the storm ne'er broke;  
His hook he baited with a dragon's tail.  
He sat upon a rock and bobbed for whale."



The metaphor was carried out by asking what we were to do with this whale, a large navy, when we got it. Moreover, the German whale would not last long anyway under the attacks of our devil-fish mines and submarine sharks. It is apparent that the very exaggeration of these methods of approach would amuse and interest boys; it taught the vividness of the metaphor more forcibly than a week's discussion.

Not only should the debate be interesting, but it should also be natural rather than artificial. What is more tiresome and more absurd than this form of address: "Mr. Chairman, Honorable Judges, Most Worthy Opponents, Ladies and Gentlemen?" It is much more natural to say simply "Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gnetlemen." Again, it seems best to prohibit entirely the use of all technical terms and fixed forms of expression, such as *affirmative*, *negative*, *opponent*, *colleague*, etc. When one is arguing in everyday life he does not say: "The affirmative maintains . . ." He says rather: "It has been said . . ." Why should not the same be done in our school debates?

The debates must be interesting, and the after-dinner speeches, the second part of the senior course, must be true-to-life and humorous. The atmosphere and conditions under which this latter kind of address is given should be as much like real life as possible; in a private school, the dining hall is the place. The element of humor can be secured through a judicial use of the anecdote. Probably the best rule for the after-dinner speech is that of James Russell Lowell, that it should be composed of an anecdote, a quotation, and a platitude. At any rate this formula has been accepted by many brilliant assemblies since then; that is some proof of its quality. The anecdote gives the jovial element so necessary to complete the comfortable feeling of content that a good banquet gives; the quotation or pointed epigrams, like the verse from the Bible in a real sermon, gives the text, the gist, of the little post-prandial sermon; finally the platitude is the explanation or elaboration of the point, and about this, as Mr. Lowell slyly remarks, we need not bother ourselves, for we will attain it anyway. Of course every after-dinner speech does not have to follow this formula; there is more than one recipe for making good bread. If the speech is concise, terse, in part humorous, and in part presenting a single idea forcibly, it cannot but be good.

It will be found that the boys are much more successful with the after-dinner speech than with any other type of

public address. The simplicity and naturalness of this form and the practical value of the training all appeal to them. Moreover, the use of a conversational style and the comparative informality of the occasion encourage spontaneity. Indeed, so interested will the boys become in this kind of public speaking that no external spurs or prizes are necessary.

To sum up, a course in declamation culminating in prize speaking; a course in after-dinner speaking followed by the commencement orations,—this, it is submitted, will constitute a proper and sufficient training in public speaking. It will give advanced work in voice culture, which oral composition neglects; it will give practice in the composition of public addresses, which is lacking in elocution and insufficient in oral composition. It tends to eliminate the artificial and the formal, and to secure the interesting and practical elements. It requires merely the fullest co-operation of the principal and of a special instructor in public speaking who is trained both in English Composition and in the technique of the voice.

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#### EDITORIAL NOTES

It would be difficult to exaggerate the interest and importance of the meeting of our Association which was held on Saturday, December 11, at the Boston Public Library. We had as our guests on this occasion Miss Alice M. Jordan, Head of the Children's Department, Boston Public Library; Miss Mary E. Hall, Chairman of the Committee on High School Libraries, N. E. A.; Professor Allan Abbott, Teachers College, Columbia, University; Miss Margaret Coult, Barringer High School, Newark, N. J.; and Mr. George Parker Winship, Librarian of the Widener Collection.

These speakers, in discussing *The Library in the Secondary School*, brought forcibly to our attention the fact that many schools in New England are far behind schools in other parts of the country. Not many of us have realized the necessity of the trained librarian; we have not secured from our school committees the appropriation that adequate equipment of books and apparatus demands; we have not all learned the art of co-operating with the public library; we have not keenly interested ourselves in creating an English Department "morgue"; we have been negligent in the effective use of pictures; we have not realized the possibilities of collecting commercial exhibits. The emphasis laid upon



all these points ought to stir even the most lethargic. And the net result ought to be better work in the English classroom, more interest in the world's affairs, a more eager desire to read the best of the world's literature.

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For the special exhibit that revealed so concretely the possibilities of library work in the schools, we are deeply indebted to Miss Alice M. Jordan, of the Boston Public Library, and, Miss Mary E. Hall, of the Girls' High School of Brooklyn.

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To Mr. Lane and Mr. Winship, of Harvard University, we should also like to express our sincere thanks. Every possible courtesy was extended us, and when we left the Widener Library we were also very grateful to Mr. Browne for the opportunity he had afforded Mr. Lane and Mr. Winship, and the trustees of the Boston Public Library to display all this kindness.

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On Monday evening, Nov. 15, a meeting arranged by the Committee on Local Conferences was held in the assembly hall of the Bridgewater Normal School. Nearly two hundred parents and teachers of Bridgewater listened to papers on the subject, "What shall our children read?" Mrs. Wallace Boyden spoke on the topic from the point of view of the home; Miss Frances Warner from the point of view of the school. The discussion which followed showed clearly that the motion-picture theatre is the problem above all others that interests parents and teachers today,—especially in its relation to reading and the forming of a reading habit among children between ten and fourteen years of age.

Your committee feels that meetings of this sort are stimulating and thoroughly worth-while. Will you not help us to arrange a conference in your town?

SAMUEL THURBER.

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